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President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 47

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General (A/55/542)

Draft resolution (A/55/L.44/Rev.1)

The President: Before giving the floor to the first speaker, I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 6 October 2000 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the observer of Switzerland in the debate on agenda item 47.

In view of the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on that request.

If there is no objection to the proposal, may I take it that the General Assembly decides to hear a statement by the observer of Switzerland in the debate on this item?

It was so decided.

The President: I call on the representative of France, who will introduce draft resolution A/55/L.44/Rev.1.

Mr. Le Caruyer de Beauvais (France) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the countries of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as Iceland, a European Free Trade Association country that is a member of the European Economic Area.

This agenda item, "Assistance in mine action", involves a scourge that continues, day after day, to claim innocent lives all over the world. The tragedy of anti-personnel mines,' which particularly affect the civilian populations of countries already suffering as a result of past or current armed conflict, continues unabated despite the efforts of the international community.

A large number of countries are, however, devoting substantial resources to mine action, such as mine-clearance programmes and landmine victim assistance operations. The amount spent on this effort in 1999 is estimated at more than $219 million. This is clearly not sufficient, however, to eliminate the unfortunately often irreversible effects of the use of this cowardly and cruel weapon. We must therefore continue the parallel diplomatic endeavour to convince an ever-growing number of countries to join our fight.

The focus today should be on the responsibility of those who are still using these mines that kill and mutilate every day. The international community must

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unremittingly insist that they stop using these arms and encourage them to become involved in the fight against mines.

Substantial developments have taken place over the last year in combating anti-personnel landmines. The number of States parties to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction continues to grow. The Meeting of States parties to this Convention, held last September in Geneva, adopted several reforms that, we hope, will further enhance the effectiveness of mine action.

The European Union hopes that this fight will be waged in every way that can lead to results. As a priority, it is pushing for the comprehensive and speedy implementation of the Ottawa Convention, which unquestionably set an international standard.

In particular we support the efforts of the non-governmental organizations, whose energy devoted to advancing the fight against mines is an essential factor of progress. The progress made thus far is largely due to that positive action. The Union also supports the central role played by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, as the sole United Nations coordinator in the area of demining.

We cannot confine our efforts to policy statements. In the more concrete field of demining and victim assistance programmes, which since 1997 have been part of a common action adopted by the European Union, the European Commission and the member States spent more than 103 million euros on operational programmes last year, making the Union the largest contributor to these activities. Its aid will continue to be focused, on a priority basis, on those countries that have acceded to the Ottawa Convention. We call on those countries able to do so to follow us in this approach, and we welcome the efforts of all the other countries that support action in the fight against anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Secretary-General's report again shows the scope of the task remaining to be accomplished if we are to continue and enhance the international community's efforts to combat the scourge of anti-personnel mines. We have pledged to win this fight rapidly, and it is in this spirit that the European Union is presenting a draft resolution this year devoted to mine action. We hope that it will receive very broad support and that it can be adopted by consensus, as such resolutions have been in years past.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): Landmines endanger the safety and well-being of individuals. They prevent people from exercising basic human rights such as the right to freedom of movement, the right to food and the right to health. They ruin the prospects for economic and social development. It is important to realize the humanitarian implications and the human dimension of the landmine problem. Humanitarian mine action must be people-centred. It is a question of the socio-economic recovery of war-torn communities, reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction and, ultimately, human development.

The mine ban Convention has been invaluable in generating political momentum and providing a practical tool for the implementation of necessary action to deal with these challenges. According to the Landmine Monitor Report released by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, there have been significant accomplishments in the field during the last year. The production of anti-personnel landmines has dropped dramatically, trade has practically come to a halt, millions of stockpiled anti-personnel landmines have been destroyed, a large area of mined ground has been demined, and more importantly, there has been a significant drop in the number of new mine victims in key countries.

But the unacceptable reality remains. Landmines continue to maim and kill innocent people. Landmines continue to pose a humanitarian and socio-economic problem of crisis proportions in too many countries. Certain Governments and rebel groups continue to use anti-personnel mines. We must therefore continue our efforts to universalize the mine ban Convention, to remove mines from the ground and to better address the needs of mine victims and mine-affected communities. We urge all those States that have not yet signed and ratified the Convention to do so.

The inter-sessional work programme under the Convention was established in order to facilitate and support the effective functioning of the Convention by creating an arena where Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions could meet to exchange

information, experiences and expertise and to mobilize resources to meet the needs in the field. The first year of this programme has been successful. It was encouraging to see the large number of participants from mine-affected areas and organizations working in the field. The active participation of the relevant United Nations agencies during this work programme is welcome.

Norway welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action. We fully share the approach by which from an early stage mine action constitutes an integral part of the Organization's broader response to humanitarian crises, development and reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of conflict. Mine action cannot be perceived as a mere technical operation. In carrying out its role in mine action, the United Nations must acknowledge the implications of the problem and the urgency with which it has to be addressed. Most United Nations agencies, and in particular the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme, are in some way or another affected by the landmines problem on a daily basis through their various programmes. The need to deal effectively with landmines is increasingly also being realized in relation to peacekeeping operations. Greater coherence of efforts related to landmines within the United Nations is required. In this regard we support the continuous development and role of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) as the focal point for mine action within the United Nations system, in close cooperation with the relevant agencies and programmes. We have contributed to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action in support of the activities of UNMAS, and support efforts to put UNMAS on a more secure and stable financial footing.

We attach great importance to the revision of the international standards for humanitarian mine clearance and the development of international test procedures and guidelines for the use of mine-detection dogs and mechanical mine-clearance equipment. This will make mine-action programmes more effective and reduce accident rates and instances of incomplete clearance.

Predictable and stable funding is necessary to carry out mine-action programmes effectively. Norway has made a commitment of $120 million over a five-year period. Since 1998 more than $63 million has been allocated to mine-action projects in the field.

I would like to highlight a few points that Norway regards as being of particular relevance with regard to the implementation of mine-action programmes for next year.

The first is dissemination of information. We must continue to focus on improving the dissemination of relevant information. This includes enhancing transparency in mine-action funding; continuing the level I impact surveys; continuing the development and implementation of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA); promoting transparency in victims assistance programming and highlighting gaps; relevant guidelines for mine action; exchange of information regarding stockpile destruction; and encouraging States parties to the mine ban Convention to comply with the reporting obligations in accordance with article 7.

The second point regards coordination and flexibility. We should make better use of coordination mechanisms at the country and local levels. It is preferable that these mechanisms be headed by the national and local authorities. Coordination groups should include donors, international organizations and national and international non-governmental organizations, and the groups should work closely with mine-action coordination centres. The United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre in Kosovo is a special case, but it has managed to encompass all major mine-action actors in one homogeneous structure. This experience should be shared with other mine-action programmes, bearing in mind that each situation is different.

The third point concerns implementation. We must continue to focus on progress in the field. The only sound goal is to further improve the figures on cleared land and to achieve a decline in the number of new landmine victims. To this end, we will continue to give priority to the full implementation of the mine ban Convention as the only international instrument for addressing mine action in a comprehensive way.

Finally, as regards victim assistance, existing structures within the health and social sectors should be reinforced and services and programmes aimed at mine victims should include all persons with disabilities, regardless of their cause. International organizations, donors and affected States should

examine further ways of enhancing mine-victim assistance, including socio-economic reintegration.

Norway looks forward to continuing its close collaboration with all relevant actors in meeting the challenges ahead.

Mr. Livermore (Canada): Canada wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for again providing such a comprehensive report on mine action. He has clearly highlighted the central issue before us: a global landmine problem posing challenges to us all. Equally, however, the report records impressive progress. We are grateful for the important role that the United Nations has played in achieving this progress.

In particular, Canada applauds the activities of the United Nations Mine Action Service in its important coordination role and in assessing the threat of landmines in numerous countries. We thank the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs for its work in supporting the Meetings of the States parties to the Ottawa Convention and in ensuring the effective transparency of reports submitted under article 7 of the Convention. We extend our appreciation to the United Nations Development Programme for its commitment to develop long-term capacity to manage and coordinate mine-action programmes. And we acknowledge and appreciate the important role of other United Nations agencies in addressing the insidious effects of landmines.

(*spoke in French*)

The Secretary-General has pointed out that landmines continue to cause tremendous suffering in many of the world's countries. We now know, however, that the novel measures that have been taken at the global level to address this problem are beginning to make a difference. The Ottawa Convention, which has now been officially accepted by a majority of the world's States, provides the international community a general framework for resolving the problem of landmines. In 1999 we celebrated the early entry into force of this important humanitarian instrument. This year, the partnership between Governments and civil society, which is essential, was strengthened in an effort to bring about the full implementation of the Convention.

(*spoke in English*)

This positive change is measurable. According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmine's Landmine Monitor Report, the number of producers of anti-personnel mines has dropped sharply in recent years, from 54 to 16. Today, of the 34 nations known to have exported anti-personnel mines in the past, all but one have at least made a formal statement that they have ceased to export. And more than 22 million stockpiled landmines have been destroyed in recent years by more than 50 nations.

In the most mine affected States in the world, more land is being freed from its deadly bondage and is being returned to productive use in communities that need it the most. While the inhumanity of antipersonnel landmines continues to claim new victims, we also know that casualty rates are declining — largely due to efforts to deliver risk-reducing mine awareness programmes. The guidelines for the delivery of mine awareness education developed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) should go a long way to improving the effectiveness of this important aspect of mine action. We encourage both the implementation of these guidelines and regular evaluations to ensure the effectiveness of mine awareness education.

Landmine survivors and their communities are now receiving more and better services and support. We commend organizations like the Landmine Survivors Network for continuing to be at the forefront of delivering services to landmine victims and encouraging Governments to honour commitments to those whose lives have been changed as a result of the horrors of landmines.

More information and better ways of managing this information are leading to effective international priority-setting. Over the past year, an impressive amount of progress has been made in undertaking socio-economic impact surveys and assessment missions and in the deployment to date in 11 countries of the Information Management System for Mine Action, developed by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

Possibly most important of all, increased efforts are being undertaken to ensure the sustainability of mine action efforts. In Canada, for example, the Canadian Landmine Foundation has been established to promote ongoing private sector involvement in addressing the global landmine problem. In other countries as well, resource mobilization efforts have

given the international community new tools to carry out vital programmes.

While heartened by this progress, we are reminded on a daily basis of the challenges that remain. We therefore recognize that achieving the promise of the Ottawa Convention means continuing the struggle against the production, use, stockpiling and transfer of these insidious weapons. We call upon those States that remain outside of the framework of the Ottawa Convention to join the majority of the world's States that have chosen to eradicate these weapons — in years, not decades.

We reiterate our call to those in a position to do so to provide technical and financial assistance to meet the enormous challenges of mine action and, where relevant, to integrate mine action efforts into development planning and programming. In a similar vein, we call upon the Security Council, when establishing mandates for peacekeeping operations, to express its readiness to consider articulating objectives for mine action in the context of its mandates.

To ensure continued progress towards the universalization of the Convention, we need to set practical deadlines. For example, with the Convention's third annual meeting, scheduled for Managua in September of next year, we should commit ourselves to the total destruction of stockpiled mines in the Americas by that time. We should strive to ensure that at least 120 States have ratified the Convention by that date, and we should ensure that all States parties are in compliance with the Convention's transparency reporting requirements.

To meet these targets, we need to identify and address impediments. For example, at a recent seminar on stockpile destruction held in Buenos Aires, delegations from signatory countries of the Americas agreed on a practical, achievable work plan. Experts will be coordinated to provide technical assistance on stockpile destruction in a timely manner. Assistance will be provided to help States in completing transparency reports.

While the meeting in Managua next year will rightly place a spotlight on the Americas, we are equally committed to making progress in other parts of the world. To maintain the momentum in Africa, for example, Canada, France and Mali are supporting a conference to take place in Bamako in February 2001. At that time, we hope to develop plans of action and means to undertake these actions in the African context. Similarly, Canada and Hungary will be sponsoring a regional seminar on the special problems of PFM landmine destruction to be held in Budapest in early February of next year. This will draw upon the special expertise of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and some of its member States.

(spoke in French)

We all share a common cause to find a common solution to the problem of landmines in the world. It is our joint responsibility to honour the memory of those who have lost their lives as a result of the use of these weapons, and it is our obligation to help the victims of landmines. We await the day when we can declare the world free of the scourge of mines.

(spoke in English)

In all of this work, the role of the United Nations, its agencies and its partner organizations is absolutely central. Through international cooperation, effectively coordinated and implemented, we can get the most out of limited resources. Through the leadership of the United Nations, we can move forward collectively, in keeping with common standards. Through the moral suasion of the United Nations, we can make the Ottawa Convention the standard of universality and comprehensiveness necessary for the total eradication of the scourge of landmines.

I applaud the leadership of the Organization. Canada looks forward to continued cooperation on mine action in the years ahead.

Mr. Kobayashi (Japan): In the last few years, the international community has made significant progress in the area of mine action, which includes mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance. It is clear that the Ottawa Convention, concluded in September 1997, was a turning point in facilitating mine action throughout the world. Japan is pleased that in only three years the number of States parties has now reached 107. Since Japan has encouraged countries that have not yet decided to participate in the Convention to do so, Japan would like to express its appreciation to all those countries which have become parties.

Japan would also like to express its deep appreciation to the relevant United Nations agencies, particularly the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), which serves as a focal point of United

Nations mine action, as well as other relevant international organizations and non-governmental agencies that have taken initiatives in this area. The progress that has been made would have been impossible without their efforts and without their partnership.

Despite a growing list of accomplishments, we have to face the severe reality that landmines continue to harm human beings in post-conflict countries and that they are actually still being laid in some countries where conflicts continue. Considering the fact that the labour of removing landmines is much harder and more expensive than that of laying them, and that the physical and physiological damage to victims lasts such a long time, it is clear that we must continue to strengthen our efforts to counter this evil.

Not only do landmines cause human suffering and sometimes deprive people of their lives in the most random and brutal manner, but the existence of landmines in the ground is also a serious obstacle to people striving to rebuild their lives in post-conflict countries. We believe that the problems they cause have to be addressed as a threat to human life, survival and dignity. They are therefore a threat to human security, a concept that Japan is promoting and that Prime Minister Mori of Japan focused on in his speech at the Millennium Summit. It is from the standpoint of ensuring human security that Japan confirms its determination to tackle the problems posed by landmines in collaboration with international community.

At the Ottawa signing conference, in 1997, then Foreign Minister Obuchi proposed that we should establish a "zero victim" goal. That idea was incorporated into the Maputo Declaration, which was adopted at the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, which was last year. We reiterated the importance of that goal at the Second Meeting of the States Parties, which was held in Geneva last September. In order to achieve the "zero victim" goal, Japan announced that it would contribute ¥10 billion, or about $90 million, over the five-year period beginning in 1998. To achieve that target, Japan has continued to make financial contributions to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action, which is managed by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the Afghanistan project managed by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGO), together with bilateral assistance to mine-affected countries.

It is important to assist the capacity-building of mine-affected countries in order to enable them to play the primary role in mine action. For that reason, Japan has supported the establishment of mine action centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cambodia, Thailand, Mozambique and Chad. Japan believes that a mine action centre can be a useful mechanism to encourage the initiatives of those mine-affected countries. Last September, Japan earmarked $500,000 of its contribution to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action for a project to establish a mine action centre on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border.

Japan also believes that coordinating the activities of various bodies and setting standards for their activities are important, as a number of international organizations and NGOs have undertaken activities in mine action in the last few years. From this point of view, Japan expects UNMAS to serve as a focal point for the coordination of mine action. This year, Japan has contributed $400,000 to strengthen UNMAS.

Moreover, in order to promote partnership and the sharing of knowledge among NGOs, the development of an information management system should be encouraged. Japan supports the idea of the so-called Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) project serving as a consolidated data base for mine action in mine-affected countries. Japan appreciates the cooperation between UNMAS and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) in elaborating this important tool. To facilitate the activities of NGOs in this area, the development of standards such as guidelines for mine action is critical. To that end, Japan made a financial contribution to the revision of the safety handbook on mine clearance, which will be published soon. Japan also made a contribution to the study of guidelines for the use of dogs in mine detection, which is an UNMAS-GICHD initiative. We did so because our past contributions towards the use of dogs produced good results in mine action in Croatia.

Since mine action in post-conflict countries usually starts with mine clearance, we have accumulated extensive experience and resources in that

area. But Japan thinks that it is also time to emphasize the importance of victim assistance in order truly to enhance the well-being of people in mine-affected countries. Since Japan has long recognized the importance of victim assistance, it has cooperated in many initiatives in this area, including projects in Cambodia, Laos, Nicaragua and Guatemala. Determined to continue to cooperate in the area of victim assistance, Japan now serves with Nicaragua as a Vice-Chairman in the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance, Socio-economic Reintegration and Mine Awareness of the Ottawa Convention. Victim assistance should be broad in scope and not be limited to medical assistance and the provision of artificial limbs, but also linked to the creation of job opportunities that enable victims to re-integrate themselves into their societies.

The international community should address the problem of landmines with all available mental and physical resources in order to achieve the "zero victim" goal. For its part, Japan is committed to making an active contribution to mine action so that we do not bequeath an Earth contaminated by landmines to the generations to come in the twenty-first century.

Mr. Hollis (Australia): Today I would like to outline the actions that the Australian Government has taken since signing the Ottawa Convention in December 1997 to play our part in ensuring that a world free of landmines is realized.

In 1998, the Australian Parliament enacted the Anti-Personnel Mines Convention Act, which gives force to the provisions of the Ottawa Convention under Australian law, making it a criminal offence for Australian citizens or Defence Force personnel to place, possess, develop, acquire, stockpile or transfer anti-personnel landmines. In keeping with our obligations under article 6 of the Convention, the Australian Government has become a significant contributor to international mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance programmes, with a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific region.

During the past year, the Australian Government sponsored the "Destroy a Minefield" campaign, which involved non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and government. The "Destroy a Minefield" initiative seeks sponsors in the Australian community to clear specifically named minefields in Cambodia. Every two dollars raised is matched by one dollar from the Government. That initiative was not solely a fund-raising campaign, but served to raise awareness of the problem of the devastating impact of landmines in affected communities. The Australian Government has been involved in mine clearance activities since 1989. The Government has committed a total of at least A$100 million to these activities for the decade to 2005. To date, the bulk of that funding has been directed to Cambodia, Laos, Mozambique and Angola.

As envisaged in article 4 of the Convention, Australia destroyed its stockpile of anti-personnel landmines in September 1999. That process was completed almost four years before we were required to complete it under the Convention. The exercise involved the destruction of almost 130,000 mines, or some 27 metric tons. As is allowed for under the Convention, a number were retained for training and research purposes. To carry this out, the Australian Defence Force developed an innovative and cost-effective method of destruction, using ammonium nitrate fuel oil and diesel fuel. That technique has attracted significant interest from other States parties to the Convention, and the Australian Defence Force believes that, for many countries assessing options for stockpile destruction, this method offers a cheap and effective answer. In order to assist other countries in this regard, the Australian Government has made available to States parties the technical report into the destruction of our stockpile and has expressed its willingness to provide additional information to those States requiring it.

Underlining that commitment, two Australian army personnel visited Peru in June of this year in response to a request for such assistance from the Government of Peru. The purpose of the visit was to assess the suitability of the method for dealing with Peru's landmines stockpile. We understand that, as a result, the Peruvian army will shortly destroy its stockpile, employing the techniques developed by the Australian army.

The leading role that Australia has taken on this issue has resulted in Australia being selected as a co-rapporteur of the Ottawa Convention's Standing Committee on Stockpile Destruction. Indeed Australia is an active participant in the full range of Ottawa Convention standing committees.

So, that is what we have achieved to date. But where do we focus our attention now? The declaration issued in September at the conclusion of the Second Meeting of States Parties reflected positively on the progress made to date but acknowledged that considerable work lies before us. While we acknowledge the rapid progress in expanding the number of States parties — there are now 107 — my Government sees universalization of the Convention as a central priority.

The Australian Government is contributing to global efforts aimed at promoting greater adherence to the Convention by focusing our energies on our own neighbourhood. Through our network of diplomatic missions, we have called on the countries of the South Pacific to adhere to the Convention. We were very encouraged therefore by the ratification of Nauru and accession of Kiribati, which occurred immediately prior to the Second Meeting of States Parties, held in September. The Australian Government is also working with the Australian network of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines to develop a collaborative programme to build support for the Convention among the countries of South-East Asia.

The Australian Government is also prepared to consider sharing its technical expertise with regional countries, for example, through the provision of training in stockpile-destruction techniques. Through the Government's mine action programme, we will consider funding activities under the programme, and we have made a commitment to provide up to 200,000 Australian dollars for advocacy activities.

I would like to turn briefly now to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW), also frequently referred to as the inhumane weapons Convention. While the CCW does not prohibit the use, production or transfer of landmines, it places restrictions its on States parties. It is particularly important as it brings on board a number of key producers and users of landmines that have not yet joined the Ottawa Convention.

The CCW also deals with a range of other weapons, such as anti-vehicle mines, blinding laser weapons and incendiary devices, which are not covered by the Ottawa Convention. As a long-standing supporter, the Australian Government believes that the CCW continues to have an important role to play in dealing with mines and other weapons with similar indiscriminate effects. With that in mind, the Government has announced Australia's candidacy for the presidency of the CCW review conference due to be held at the end of 2001.

Members may be assured that Australia will continue to support the Ottawa Convention and to play its part in ensuring that a world free of landmines is realized.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Let me join other speakers in conveying my appreciation to the Secretary-General for the comprehensive and informative report (A/55/542) he has presented to us on assistance in mine action. The report gives an overview of mine action undertaken in various countries throughout the world by United Nations programmes and other related agencies.

Every day, innocent people are being injured or killed by landmines and other unexploded ordnance still scattered on the surface or buried in the soil in more than 60 countries around the world. With the assistance of the international community, national Governments have put a great deal of energy into overcoming the problem and have done everything that they possibly could. The achievements have been important, but, unquestionably, much remains to be done. More concerted action at the international level is needed, and every effort should be made to intensify international cooperation to ensure success in this challenging task.

As a result of the heaviest aerial bombardment during the Indo-China war, especially between 1964 and 1973, our country, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, is today still seriously affected by unexploded ordnance. At present, unexploded ordnance contamination affects up to 50 per cent of the country's land. Found everywhere — in villages, in towns, along roads, on hillsides, in gardens and in rice fields — the bomblets, or *bombies* as they are known in Laos, simply strike their victims without distinction, including children, women and subsistence farmers.

To address this problem, our Government since 1996 has had a comprehensive programme with the objective of reducing the number of civilian casualties from unexploded ordnance and increasing the amount of land available for food production and other development activities. The programme is divided into

four important components: community awareness; training and capacity building; survey; and clearance. It is important to note that many successes have been recorded in the course of its implementation. Hundreds of thousands of people have been briefed about the dangers of unexploded ordnance, and as a result the number of accidents has been reduced. In addition, more than 1,700 hectares of land have been cleared and some 280,000 pieces of unexploded ordnance have been destroyed.

The programme has also trained more than 1,200 Laotians to work in the field. These national personnel are working very hard on the ground, and the majority are now able to perform their activities without the assistance of foreign experts.

We hope to achieve further positive results in the years ahead. Let me, on behalf of the Lao Government, express our sincere thanks to the Governments of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, as well as to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the European Union, for the technical and financial support they have extended to us in our endeavours to overcome this problem.

It is our fervent hope that the Lao unexploded ordnance programme will continue to receive the necessary financial support from our donors, both bilateral and multilateral, in order to enable it to accomplish the tasks assigned to it.

As we enter the new millennium, landmines and unexploded ordnance continue to be a subject of profound concern to the international community. Let us work hard and together try to solve this problem, thereby giving those living under the threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance a chance to enjoy a peaceful and productive existence. It is our belief that, through a concerted global effort, with the United Nations as a focal point, there is every chance that we will be able to live up to the tasks assigned to us.

Mr. Steinberg (United States of America): The United States is pleased once again to co-sponsor the draft resolution on "Assistance in mine action".

The 70 million landmines planted in one third of the world's nations pose a tragic threat not only to individuals — some 300,000 of whom are disabled from landmine accidents — but also to peace, democracy and national reconciliation. These mines prevent refugees and displaced persons from returning from their homes long after the guns have gone silent, and they hinder transition from relief to recovery and development.

That is why the United States is strongly committed to mobilizing the resources needed to achieve a mine-safe world by the year 2010, a goal we are facilitating under President Clinton's "Demining 2010 Initiative". Since President Clinton spoke from this rostrum in 1994 against the terror of landmines, our Government has dedicated about $400 million to humanitarian mine action and demining technologies, and we will provide more than $100 million more in the year 2001. This is a significant contribution, but no Government, international agency or private group can on its own make more than a small dent in this problem. We must work together.

This year the United States is working with more than three dozen nations around the world to demine the most dangerous minefields, train humanitarian deminers and teach children and their parents how to identify and avoid these weapons. These programmes take place in all parts of the world, with the largest programmes in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Mozambique, Angola, Cambodia, Rwanda, Laos and Central America.

We are also using the best scientific talents in the United States to identify new techniques for mine detection and mine clearance. The Patrick Leahy War Victims Fund — named in honour of one of our nation's heroes in the fight against landmines — and other agencies are supplying prosthetic devices and medical, vocational and psychological assistance for survivors of landmine accidents in a dozen countries, working through the Viet Nam Veterans of America foundation, the Landmine Survivors Network, the International Centre for Rehabilitation and other dedicated groups.

Success in the fight against landmines is not measured, however, in the number of programmes or even in the number of landmines lifted from the soil, but in its impact on the lives of people in mine-affected countries. Here there are real victories. Cambodia has cut its landmine accident rate from 500 per month in

1992 to 50 per month now — still too many, but a significant improvement.

In Afghanistan, despite continuing instability, tens of thousands of hectares of previously mined farmlands have been put back into cultivation. In Mozambique, the clearance of thousands of miles of roads has allowed hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons to return home.

It is gratifying to watch how quickly people resume their lives and regain their dignity after being informed that their fields, their villages and their schools are mine-safe. Rwanda, Namibia and Central America are also making great strides in eliminating minefields.

We are proud to work with the United Nations system to help achieve these results. We salute the key role played by the United Nations Mine Action Service under the able past leadership of Tore Skedsmo and Mary Fowler, as well as the future leadership of Martin Barber.

We also salute the vital contributions of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the World Health Organization (WHO) and other organizations.

We are also helping to strengthen mine action centres abroad; support the groundbreaking work of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and James Madison University; create, with the European Union and others, global sites to assess promising demining technologies; and enlist the support of the 44-nation Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council on humanitarian demining.

Another exciting development has been the public-private partnerships necessary to address this global challenge. For example, the United Nations Association of the United States of America is working with the United Nations and the United Nations Foundation on the Adopt-a-Minefield Programme, which generates private contributions to demine the worst-mined fields in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia, Croatia and Mozambique. The Survey Action Centre, working with the Viet Nam Veterans of America foundation and the United Nations Foundation, is helping to produce for the United Nations mine surveys of a dozen countries to help plan new strategies.

DC Comics has created more than a million mine-awareness comic books for the children of Bosnia, Central America and Kosovo. The Marshall Legacy Institute and the Humpty Dumpty Institute are purchasing, training and deploying mine-detecting dogs. Wheelchairs for the World is helping increase the mobility of disabled people in dozens of countries.

These actions reflect the best humanitarian instincts to address the tragedy of landmines one person and one mine at a time.

On a related front, the United States welcomes the international commitment to protecting civilians around the world from landmines, embodied in the Ottawa Treaty and the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. We salute the Governments, international organizations and civic groups under the International Campaign to Ban Landmines that move the dream of a mine-safe world closer to reality.

For our part, since 1996, the United States has destroyed 3.3 million landmines. In 1997, President Clinton permanently banned the export or transfer of anti-personnel landmines and we are seeking to universalize this ban in the Conference on Disarmament. In 1999, the United States adhered to the second Amended Protocol to the Convention on conventional weapons, which contains key restrictions on landmine use. We are also actively seeking alternatives to landmines and we will adhere to the Ottawa Treaty by 2006 if we find and deploy these alternatives.

I know that many around the United States and many around the world would have us take a different course on the Ottawa Treaty. Still, this disagreement must not deter us from our common vision of eliminating the threat of landmines around the world by the close of this decade. Working together, we can meet this challenge. We owe the next generation of the world's citizens nothing less than the right to walk the Earth without fear.

Mr. Sorreta (Philippines): Much has been said about the imperative need for the United Nations to improve its working methods. Critics have said that, when it comes to the Organization's agencies, the left hand knows not what the right hand is doing. This is clearly not the case when it comes to mine action.

Mine action is an important humanitarian concern that would have warranted the creation of a whole new bureaucracy under our Organization. But rather than going in that direction, we have instead concentrated on creating a coordinating structure through which we are able to maximize the strengths of 14 United Nations agencies, as well as the members of civil society, in ensuring the viability and success of our mine action efforts. In this regard, we recognize and commend the United Nations Mine Action Service for its role as the critical focal point for all our efforts. While much remains to be done, much has also been achieved by the Mine Action Service and we join all others in agreeing that we should continue to offer the Mine Action Service our continued support.

The crucial step towards where we are today was taken when consensus was achieved on the need to approach mine action activities on a broader and far more comprehensive basis — that is, to not focus exclusively on mine clearance. With the recognition that we also need to emphasize the full and total impact of the mine problem, including the socio-economic issues and the importance of long-term solutions, mine action has taken on a whole new dimension, resulting not only in progress in demining, but also in our being better able to deal with the victims, the lands and the societies affected.

This evolution required the development, initiation, coordination and support of activities in which the United Nations had not had the full benefit of experience. We are glad that this approach continues to expand and that it now includes recognition of the need to provide assistance in destroying stockpiles of mines as an additional element of mine action.

As before, we are co-sponsoring the draft resolution before us, for it not only reflects the important developments in mine action, but also symbolizes the success of the comprehensive and coordinated approach that we have taken on mine action. This approach is described in a concise and pointed manner in the Secretary-General's excellent report on assistance in mine action. His report showcases the coordinated activities of the different agencies of the United Nations, as well as the work of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The report also chronicles the commitment and generosity of the donor States, without which very little could have been achieved, and we join a grateful world in thanking them for their critical role in mine action.

I agree with the Secretary-General when he observes that the global landmine problem continues to pose daunting challenges to the international community and to the United Nations system. There has been a sharp increase in the number of countries and areas requiring assistance in mine action, placing further demands on finite resources. Mine-related activities will also have to take into account the increasing recognition that unexploded ordnance will also have to be dealt with in the future. While we must continue to make sure that the mine action activities of the United Nations have the necessary resources, we must also make every effort to ensure that the landmine problem does not continue to grow.

The landmine ban is one solution that the Philippines fully supports. We join the many others who have called for the universality of the Ottawa Convention. We believe that, if we are to move forward with mine action in a comprehensive manner, we must go to the source of these weapons and prevent them from ever being produced or deployed.

While a landmine ban is an important part of the overall solution, we have seen that parties to armed conflicts are still somehow able to circumvent all sorts of bans and embargoes. It is also therefore, important that we continue our efforts in the United Nations and elsewhere to prevent and reduce conflicts by addressing their fundamental causes and by providing the forums and opportunities for these conflicts to be resolved in a just, peaceful and meaningful manner.

Mr. Aboulgheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt attaches particular importance to the problem of landmines and to the international efforts to assist affected countries. We do so because we have suffered for over 50 years from the problem of landmines and unexploded ordnance.

It is from this realistic perspective that the delegation of Egypt has reviewed the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action and welcomes the attention paid by the General Assembly to the follow-up of this subject since 1993. The international community has also given increasing priority to the need to address this problem, reflecting its understanding of the threat posed by the problem of landmines, which must be addressed comprehensively, taking into account all its aspects and dimensions.

While we agree with the central tenet of paragraph 118 of the Secretary-General's report, emphasizing the impact of the mine problem on relevant socio-economic issues and the importance of long-term solutions, we nevertheless believe that this will provide only a partial solution to the problem. It does not address the problem in a comprehensive manner, although the efforts of the international community regarding the problem of landmines should cover all the elements and dimensions of the problem on an equal basis, including the humanitarian, development, economic, demographic and security dimensions. This is necessary if we are to provide a comprehensive solution to all these problems, rather than partial and temporary ones.

On the other hand, Egypt — one of the most seriously affected victims of landmines — finds it difficult to agree with the reference made in paragraph 118 of the Secretary-General's report that a new approach has emerged, which is no longer exclusively centred on mine clearance, but which has come to include mine awareness training, victim assistance, rehabilitation, reintegration efforts and advocacy.

Although Egypt supports these efforts, we think that it is necessary for this approach to dealing with mine problems to concentrate first and foremost on the effort to clear mines, since they represent a direct threat to humanity and to economic development. Next in priority would come other efforts, such as those cited in the report.

Regarding paragraph 122 of the Secretary-General's report, I believe that some clarification by the Secretariat is required concerning the last part, which mentions that the resources mobilized by the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action should be devoted to humanitarian purposes. This indicates that resources of voluntary contributions would be allocated for humanitarian purposes, whereas assessed contributions in the budget would be devoted to the mine activities to be decided by the Security Council. This means that the resources of the regular budget of the United Nations would be directed to the activities that are approved by the Security Council in the area of mines.

On the other hand, unfortunately, this year's report of the Secretary-General does not mention the responsibility of countries that have planted mines in the territories of other countries in the past, nor does it include any appeals to these countries to extend assistance for the clearance of those mines.

I would like once more to address the problem of landmines in Egypt. This problem can be seen in the fact that there are about 23 million mines and unexploded ordnance in Egypt that have been planted in an area of more than 280,000 hectares. A great majority of these mines date back to the Battle of El-Alamein and to other battles; the warring countries at that time planted the mines and left behind the explosives. These mines stand as an obstacle to the development of these areas, even as my country is actually trying to aid in the development of the region. In addition, they also pose a great threat to the population. Egyptian authorities, within the limits of their financial resources, are trying to implement an ambitious plan to clear landmines planted in Egypt. Work on the implementation of this plan began in July 1991 and continues to this very day.

In this connection, I would like to stress the following points. First, implementation of this Egyptian plan imposes a heavy financial and technical burden that should not be borne by the Egyptian Government alone, particularly since Egypt was not responsible for planting all those mines. Secondly, there is an urgent and pressing need for the countries that planted the mines on Egyptian land to provide accurate information and maps indicating their location. These countries should also extend assistance in the mine clearance operations.

Thirdly, the cost of clearing the landmines has increased greatly because they are now buried under many layers of sand, due to sand movement and accumulation in this part of the Egyptian Western Desert. This situation requires a sophisticated level of technology to clear these mines. Fourthly, the presence of large numbers of mines over a vast area of land stands as an obstacle to the Egyptian Government's efforts to exploit the natural resources of the region and impedes development efforts by the Egyptian Government in the Western Desert and in Sinai. Fifthly, these mines have caused and continue to cause very heavy losses and tolls that should not be ignored by the human conscience.

In this framework, and in the framework of Egypt's efforts to face the consequences of the problem of mines, during the past two years Egypt has been cooperating with the United Nations Mine Action

Service (UNMAS). As a result of this constructive cooperation, the United Nations has delegated a mission to assess the problem of mines in Egypt. This mission visited Egypt from 9 to 23 February 2000 to study and evaluate the problem. At the conclusion of this visit, the United Nations issued a report, dated 7 July 2000, that contains a comprehensive review of the problem of mines in Egypt and practical proposals to deal with it.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to express my thanks to the UNMAS unit in the Department for Peacekeeping Operations. I would like to thank UNMAS for the efforts it has exerted in this field. We plan to follow up with the Secretariat and with interested countries on measures to activate these mine clearance operations in Egypt, particularly in the Western Desert.

Egypt, for its part, established a high-level mechanism this year to organize the administrative and technical base necessary for dealing with this problem. It has set up a national committee to supervise the activities of mine clearance composed of representatives of several ministries and other concerned bodies.

The concept of dealing with the problem of mines has developed considerably since the signing of the Ottawa Convention. We have begun to deal with it from a new perspective that takes into account many considerations besides the mine clearance efforts themselves, including rehabilitation and spreading awareness. This broader nature of the problem is reflected in the title of the draft resolution that has been presented within the framework of this agenda item. It has changed from "Assistance in Demining" to "Assistance in Mine Action". As I mentioned before, although we do not object to this new orientation, we still believe that the international community should give priority to the process of mine clearance in order to avoid creating more victims of those mines.

Despite the rapid international response concerning the signing and ratification of the Ottawa Convention, and despite the fact that Egypt is in full solidarity with the humanitarian objective underlying this Convention, there are nevertheless numerous countries, including Egypt, that have many reservations on the Convention.

We have already mentioned those reservations in many international forums, and a more comprehensive study of the landmine problem is needed by the international negotiating forum established for that purpose — the Conference on Disarmament — because the Ottawa Convention has numerous shortcomings, foremost among which is that it overlooks the responsibility of countries that have planted mines in other countries. It ignores their responsibility to clear those mines. Moreover, the Convention does not take into account the need to increase assistance to countries whose territories have been exposed to mines, and it completely ignores the right and the responsibility of countries to ensure their borders and to defend themselves.

Mr. Granovsky (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation attaches great importance to the complexity of demining problems. The continued danger of mines in various areas of the world creates a serious obstacle to socio-economic development and the rehabilitation of States affected by conflicts. There are also humanitarian consequences, including casualties among the civilian population.

We have traditionally supported efforts under the auspices of the United Nations to mobilize the international community to overcome the effects of the danger of mines. We regard demining operations as an important contribution to the post-conflict peace-building process and the strengthening of regional stability. We understand and sympathize with the suffering of people on various continents who have become victims of the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines.

Sadly, Russia has had firsthand experience with this problem. Every year the services of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Emergency Situations in Russia have to neutralize over 100,000 explosive devices. Many of them remain from the Second World War. As part of the anti-terrorist operation in Chechnya, our military engineers have to face the problem of making safe the most modern mines, which are designed to destroy both people and equipment.

We recognize that the prohibition of the production, use, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines must be the overall objective of the international community. The Russian Federation favours a gradual approach towards this goal through a series of agreed temporary phases. In this connection, we consider it important to ensure the broadest possible

accession of States to Amended Protocol II, the so-called mine Protocol, to the 1980 Convention on inhumane weapons. This document is based on a careful balance of States' interests, taking into account their security and self-defence interests. We attach great importance to the Conference held in Geneva last December — the first conference of States parties to the Amended Protocol II to the Convention on inhumane weapons — and the adoption of a document to help resolve the demining problem.

The Russian Federation is making a real contribution to demining operations. Our specialists regularly take part in mine-clearance operations in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. There has been wide international recognition of the work done by Russian military engineers in the territories of the States of the former Yugoslavia. We are also actively involved in helping resolve this problem by making available digital maps of mine-infested areas.

Russia's participation in demining activity is a vivid demonstration of its commitment to international obligations regarding anti-personnel mines and of its participation in efforts to overcome the adverse effects of regional crises and to ensure peace and security in the areas affected. This work is supplemented by our constructive cooperation in demining with the States parties to the Ottawa Convention. We are taking steps to upgrade our international participation in this area. In August this year, the Russian Government adopted a decision on measures to ensure the participation of the Russian Federation in international programmes, projects and operations for humanitarian demining. This decision deals with matters pertaining to assistance to other States in demining operations.

We reaffirm our readiness to cooperate with the United Nations and with all interested States in mine-clearance activities and to actively participate in international demining operations.

Mr. Picasso (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): In recent years we have observed with satisfaction the development of a genuine international political will seeking the elimination of anti-personnel landmines. These are noxious, clever and indiscriminate weapons whose use involves ethical considerations from the viewpoint of States as well as civil society as a whole. The resulting deployment of efforts, creativity and political commitment that have given the subject of anti-personnel landmines a special place on the multilateral agenda is nothing less than full recognition of the fact that their existence is a permanent threat to humanitarian law and that their use is an affront to the principles and norms of human rights, allowing no room for justification or interpretation.

Peru has been and will continue to be a permanent standard bearer for this cause: their prohibition. From the outset it has participated in the process that led to the adoption of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines, being one of the first States to ratify it. Similarly, aware of the need to ensure its universality and full implementation, my country has also participated in the first two meetings of States parties, held in Maputo and Geneva. Peru is currently Vice-Chairman of the Demining Committee, which has been merged with the Related Technology Committee.

This intersessional work of promotion and consideration of that item has enabled the establishment of focused forums for debates designed to review demining regulations and the standards used to determine the direction of international cooperation, as well as the establishment of measures for confidence-building and peace consolidation. In this context, Peru believes that the planning and administration of programmes of action against mines must, in accordance with universally accepted standards, be determined by the armed forces of individual States, making them the central axis of national decisions on the subject.

In this spirit, Peru will participate in the forthcoming meeting of the permanent committees of Ottawa, to be held in Geneva. It is the third such meeting and is an example of the seriousness and commitment with which the international community has decided to tackle the common problem of anti-personnel landmines.

Peru is also a State party to the Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby Traps and Other Devices (Protocol II) annexed to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. It participated in the first annual conference of the parties and has submitted the required annual reports. It is awaiting with interest the

discussion to be held at the next meeting, to be held in Geneva from 11 to 13 December.

At the regional level, my country has supported, within the Organization of American States (OAS), the decision to transform the Western Hemisphere into a zone free of anti-personnel landmines that includes a register. It has also contributed to setting up a specific mechanism for international cooperation through a roster of demining experts to supplement national efforts to implement the Ottawa Convention.

Anti-personnel mines have been used in almost all wars, whether between States or within States, and have produced thousands of victims in recent years. Peru, no stranger to this scourge, has expressed its commitment to the objectives and purposes of the international agreements to which it is a party through the following concrete actions.

A working group has been set up with responsibility for the intersectoral and multidisciplinary coordination necessary to work out an action plan that will make it possible to fulfil the obligations set out in the Ottawa Convention within the time limit stipulated.

The army successfully carried out two demining projects on the border with Ecuador, which cleared approximately 300,000 square metres between January 1999 and March 2000. A project for demining the Zarumilla Canal, which benefits Peruvian and Ecuadorian farmers and people, is pending, awaiting financing. Thirty thousand anti-personnel landmines removed from minefields have been destroyed, and personnel have been trained for future destruction of arsenals. Securing lines of cooperation to finance this task is pending.

A national council to support the disabled has been created to support the physical and emotional rehabilitation of mine victims and their socio-economic reincorporation. Prevention campaigns have been developed in native languages in the affected zones on our northern border.

These important steps were possible, to a great extent, thanks to the support and cooperation of friendly States committed to the ethical and humanitarian principles of the cause. We thank Canada, the United States of America, Japan, Australia and Spain for their valuable contribution.

Peru believes that financial and technical assistance to affected countries cannot be separated from the objective of eliminating anti-personnel landmines. Along these lines, my country emphasizes that the Specific Fund for Support for Demining, Peru Account, is open within the framework of the OAS to continue to attract international cooperation for projects to carry out activities for prevention assistance to victims, and demining in the zones of the national territory still awaiting clearance.

Peru also wishes to voice its gratitude to the United Nations Development Programme and the OAS for the support programmes they have established with international donations to contribute to the resolution of long-term humanitarian problems caused by these devices. My country also acknowledges the important work carried out in this field by various non-governmental organizations.

The campaign to eradicate anti-personnel mines is a unique example of sustained international commitment to consensual ethics which initiates, in the opinion of many, in pioneering form, the long road towards a new form of global coexistence based on the acknowledgement of shared higher interests. This completely new milestone is both an inspiration and a permanent challenge that enables the will of States to be expressed as a universal standard that must be respected, even more when these weapons continue to be the direct cause of death, mutilation and intimidation to the lives of thousands of innocent civilians.

Mr. Shaukat (Pakistan): The consequences of the indiscriminate use of landmines continue to haunt the civilian population in various parts of the world. In over 60 developing countries,. including Afghanistan, Cambodia, Angola, Bosnia and Somalia, the irresponsible use of landmines as a result of foreign occupation or internal conflicts has caused serious social and economic problems. Today, in Afghanistan alone, there are almost ten million landmines scattered all over the country. While Pakistan continues to host over two million Afghan refugees, an important factor impeding their return is the landmine problem affecting their country.

Given the magnitude and scope of the global landmines crisis, the United Nations has an important role to play in efforts to deal with this problem. The United Nations has covered some distance in this area since a resolution on the subject was introduced for the first time, in 1993. While the United Nations Mine

Action Service is serving a useful purpose in terms of coordination, the role of other agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), is also important. Pakistan has closely followed the evolving United Nations role in mine action, especially in areas such as mine clearance and the development of international standards for humanitarian mine clearance operations.

My delegation has taken careful note of the Secretary-General's report entitled "Assistance in mine action", contained in document A/55/542. It provides an overview of the individual country programmes and involvement of the various United Nations agencies in mine action activities.

The report could have been more productive and useful if it had shed some light on the extent of the problem in its totality. For example, an estimated aggregate number of landmines strewn in each affected country could have been useful. Such a number could have given us a good idea of what and how much more needs to be done.

Similarly, the report does not clearly specify whether the resources deployed in each country programme are adequate, or more needs to be done. It is important that the Secretary-General's report give a clearer idea about the true extent of the problem and whether the current international efforts are sufficient to deal with it.

My delegation wishes to convey its reservations regarding the assertion made in paragraph 118 of the report, according to which a new approach on mine action has emerged "which is no longer exclusively centred on mine clearance". Pakistan believes that mine clearance or demining remains at the heart of all mine-action activities. Mine awareness, advocacy campaigns and victim assistance are, no doubt, important activities, but they cannot replace the centrality of mine clearance. There is no short cut to the actual removal of landmines in the affected countries, and there is no other sustainable solution to this problem.

We express the hope that the new approach enunciated by the Secretariat will not allow the diversion of scarce resources from mine clearance to other activities such as advocacy campaigns and so forth. In fact, we need to strengthen the hands of those who are actually undertaking mine-clearance operations away from the media spotlight. Advocacy efforts in the form of conferences, seminars and media campaigns should focus greater attention on the need to generate more resources for actual demining efforts in countries affected by this problem. Today, while the international community is well sensitized about the problem of the indiscriminate use of landmines, the resources available to tackle the issue are not commensurate with the magnitude of the problem. It is hoped that the international community, especially the developed countries, will contribute more resources to meet this challenge.

Pakistan, for its part, has actively contributed to demining operations in several affected countries. Our participation in demining operations in Kuwait, Cambodia, Angola, Bosnia and Western Sahara reflects our commitment.

The discussions on mine action should not be mixed with the demands for controlling the use of landmines, which involves issues that lie within the realm of disarmament. These issues should be dealt with in the Conference on Disarmament. In this context, Pakistan favours the initiation of negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament of an international legal instrument banning the transfer or export of landmines.

In 1997 Pakistan declared a moratorium on the export of landmines. We have also ratified the Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and have submitted information pursuant to article 11 (2) and article 13 (4) of Amended Protocol II. Pakistan remains ready to consider further measures and initiatives in the relevant multilateral forums to address the problems arising out of the indiscriminate use of landmines.

Mr. Babaa (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): The problem of landmines and other remnants of war is still one of the priority concerns of the international community. This is the eighth straight General Assembly session to discuss this very important item. This reflects the importance and the interest the members have been attaching to the seriousness of the existence of more than 120 million live mines planted in 70 countries. The international community has repeatedly shown its concern about this invisible enemy, which not only threatens the lives of thousands of children and women daily, but in fact

maims the majority of those threatened and leads to socio-economic and environmental losses for the affected countries — particularly the least developed countries.

Despite the slight progress made in the last few years in dealing with this problem, international efforts remain insufficient. This has led to continued suffering by countries affected by landmines that lack the necessary resources to develop local capacities to plan and implement comprehensive programmes in this connection. Prominent among such programmes should be mine clearance, as well as the provision of modern technical training and information exchange aimed at eliminating the risk of the slow death that threatens local populations. Another priority is providing assistance to victims so they can recover from their injuries and be reintegrated into society.

The Millennium Summit emphasized the importance of the problem of landmines. Paragraph 9 of the Millennium Declaration calls for addressing this problem. In this context, we would also like to highlight the role played by the Secretary-General and his assistants, as well as the coordinating role undertaken by the United Nations, its specialized agencies and other international organizations. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya supports the efforts of the United Nations and the international community to end this problem, which has led to the indiscriminate killing and maiming of thousands of innocent civilians and which impedes development.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for the periodic report that he submitted to the Assembly in document A/55/542. Regrettably, however, this report, once again, does not refer to the countries affected by mines that were planted by other countries in previous periods, nor does it stress the responsibility of countries that have planted mines in other countries or call on them to provide compensation to the victims.

I would like to refer to the Ottawa Convention. We support the lofty goals towards which it strives, but we believe that it ignores something basic — provisions setting out the legal responsibility of countries that have planted mines in the territories of other countries and the right of affected countries to receive compensation. The provisions of this Convention do not distinguish between the legitimate use of landmines for the defence purposes by Third World countries that do not have the capability to defend themselves against stronger countries with weapons of mass destruction, on the one hand, and the irresponsible use of mines by aggressive States possessing all kinds of deadly weapons, on the other.

My country continues to suffer from the problem of mines that were planted in its territory during the Second World War. That action has led to an unprecedented tragedy which the international community should deal with, since it is the result of the warring of three countries on our territory and since this warring resulted in a brutal tragedy for all Libyans. Facing off on Libyan territory, these battling countries planted millions of landmines to impede the advance of the enemy. That war ended more than 50 years ago, but the mines are still there in Libyan territory and in the territories of neighbouring States. The danger is compounded by the fact that these mines were planted in the desert and, because of the movement of sand dunes, flash floods and the forces of erosion, were displaced and are now found in unexpected areas.

What is required now is to force the countries responsible for laying these mines to take responsibility for the killing and maiming of Libyans, to recognize their misdeeds, to provide maps of the location of these mine fields and to provide compensation for the adverse consequences of these mines.

We have an absolute right to have these mines cleared by the countries that planted them and to have these countries provide compensation for the adverse humanitarian and economic effects. The mines were not planted as a result of a civil war or an armed conflict between our country and other countries. They were planted in military operations during the Second World War between the forces of the Allies and the forces of the Axis Powers, operations carefully set down in history. The responsibility is quite clear and manifest, and the crime is clear. Our countries have borne the burden of this war, for which we were not in the least guilty or responsible. This is quite different from the situation in other countries in which landmine problems are due to domestic conflicts or civil wars.

My delegation has announced to the General Assembly the historic agreement reached two years ago between my country and Italy, one of the three States that planted millions of mines in Libyan territory during the Second World War. By this agreement the two countries agreed to cooperate to clear mines from

Libyan territory. We have also agreed on a system of compensation and rehabilitation for those who have been affected and on the establishment of a joint fund to rebuild affected areas, to help the handicapped and to establish a medical centre to rehabilitate landmine victims.

We would like to express our satisfaction that the Italian Government has started to implement this agreement. We look forward to the other two countries following the example of Italy, recognizing their responsibility and helping us to finally get rid of the mines that are buried in our territories.

Africa is among the continents to have been set back by a large number of deadly landmines on its territory. There are over 50 million landmines planted on the African continent. They are a hidden source of death and destruction and impede the movement of people, goods and services, thereby hampering development. A single African country that has suffered from tribal conflicts and foreign intervention possesses one third of those mines, a quantity that will require over 50 years to remove if the efforts of the international community continue as slowly as they are today. The international community must therefore give high priority to providing assistance to affected African States. It must make available the necessary financial resources to enable Africa to eradicate this problem, especially as the continent faces serious challenges in other areas — a fact that should lead us to redouble our efforts on every level to overcome this problem.

During their summit in Cairo early last April, African and European leaders reaffirmed the importance of establishing international cooperation and intensifying efforts to find a comprehensive solution to the problem of landmines. They also agreed on the need to clear landmines from Africa and to establish a campaign to assist and rehabilitate mine victims, as well as to provide financial and technical support to African countries affected by mines.

Arab countries are also suffering from this chronic problem. In April a two-day regional Arab symposium on landmines and their implications for development was held at the headquarters of the League of Arab States, in Cairo. Delegations from Arab countries and other international organizations participated in that meeting to consider the political, historical, developmental, legal, humanitarian, military and information aspects of the problem. The participants came up with recommendations to provide financial support and technical assistance to countries affected by the laying of landmines. They also decided on strategies to provide information about mines. Their recommendations also called for the establishment of local committees on landmine problems in the Arab world, the preparation of studies and programmes to ensure that the problem is dealt with, and contacting relevant organizations in order to exchange information and coordinate efforts.

The symposium also decided to establish an Arab information centre to deal with the issue of mines and the dangers they pose, as well as to exchange information and expertise and to coordinate governmental and non-governmental activities in the Arab world with regard to landmine clearance in Arab countries. The participants reaffirmed the responsibility of the international community for this problem, particularly of countries responsible for planting mines in the territory of other countries. They affirmed that such States should also provide the necessary financing and technical expertise to clear mines, as well as to compensate their victims.

In conclusion, my delegation would once again like to emphasize the importance of international cooperation to clear landmines in affected countries. We wish to thank the United Nations Mine Action Service and other programmes of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as those of other international organizations, for their efforts in this area. We would also like to support the recommendations contained in chapter VII of the report, as their implementation will contribute effectively to supporting efforts aimed at dealing with this problem.

Mr. Lee Kie-cheon (Republic of Korea): Allow me to begin by expressing my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report highlighting the achievements attained so far and the challenges that lie ahead in mine-action assistance.

Since the issue of mine action was adopted as an agenda item of the General Assembly, in 1993, international efforts to tackle this problem have made some progress at the global level. The use of anti-personnel mines is on the wane; a de facto near-moratorium on the transfer of anti-personnel mines is coming into being; and the number of mine casualties has fallen considerably.

Despite all that progress, much remains to be done to resolve the problem of mines. Anti-personnel mines continue to pose a major threat to severely affected countries. Due to their persistent character, anti-personnel mines take a toll not only on people, but also on socio-economic development. They have claimed the lives of a large number of civilian victims, including women and children. They also constitute an obstacle to the return of refugees and other displaced persons, to humanitarian aid operations and to reconstruction and economic development. In response to those complex challenges, the international community must address the mine issue in a more comprehensive manner by simultaneously encompassing mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance. In doing so, we cannot overemphasize the importance of clearly defining and targeting mine-related programmes and operations.

The United Nations system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), regional organizations and national Governments have recently been more involved in mine-action activities. In that regard, my delegation would like to stress the importance of the central coordinating role of the United Nations in generating synergy in this field.

Gathering accurate and timely information and assessing the impact of mines on affected countries will form the basis for effective assistance. In that regard, it is encouraging to see that the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), developed by the United Nations Mine Action Service and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), has been improved and deployed to an increasing number of countries. We also welcome the United Nations development of International Standards for mine action.

Furthermore, we note with satisfaction that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has initiated studies on the socio-economic impact of mines on people and society and the effectiveness of corresponding efforts to reintegrate mine victims into those societies. As laudable and worthy as those studies may be, the international community should not spare equivalent efforts to reinforce simple educational tools that are increasingly valuable in saving the lives of many innocent people. Educational tools can significantly reduce the number of mine victims by increasing people's awareness of how close the danger of mines lies.

In March 1999, we witnessed the entry into force of the mine ban Convention, which aims at a total ban on anti-personnel mines. In December 1998, we also saw the entry into force of Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which restricts the use of anti-personnel mines. My delegation shares the view that the mine ban Convention provides a comprehensive framework for many aspects of mine action. However, Amended Protocol II also includes a humanitarian aspect in that it bans the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines. In our view, those two mechanisms should carry equal weight in dealing with mine problems in our current situation. My Government is now proceeding with its domestic process to accede by the end of this year to Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

The Republic of Korea shares the humanitarian concerns of the international community over the human suffering and tragic casualties caused by anti-personnel mines. In that vein, we have supported and contributed to several United-Nations-led mine action programmes. The Korean Government has been participating in the Mine Action Support Group, and has made annual contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action.

We endorse the Secretary-General's view that the United Nations should secure sound funding to meet growing requests from mine-affected countries. With that in mind, my Government will consider redoubling its support for the Trust Fund by making an extra contribution this year. Moreover, the Republic of Korea is providing financial assistance to several countries on a bilateral basis, and has plans to expand such assistance, within its capacity.

At the dawn of the new century, we need to renew our commitment to mine action activities so as to ensure for people in mine-affected countries the freedom to pursue personal development without the fear of being struck by mines. We believe that only through concerted efforts and cooperation by the international community, with the United Nations acting as focal point, can such a dream come true. I wish in conclusion to assure the Assembly that the Government of the Republic of Korea will continue to join the efforts of the international community for that purpose.

Mr. Sun (Cambodia): On behalf of the Cambodian delegation, I would like to begin my statement by congratulating the Secretary-General on his comprehensive report entitled "Assistance in mine action" (A/55/542). The report describes the daunting challenges and the strategies required to address all aspects of mine action in diverse environments. Those strategies must be well defined and targeted to meet successfully all the expectations of the world community and of the countries that are affected by landmines.

After years of strife and devastation resulting from internal political conflicts, there persists an air of restlessness in the aftermath of the devastating wars in Cambodia. With an estimated 4 million to 6 million mines and a great deal of unexploded ordnance currently buried in the soil of Cambodia, it is on the record that one out of every 380 persons in Cambodia has lost life or limb to a landmine strike. It is truly a tragedy that that country has continued to be one of the most severely mine-affected countries in the world. I am sure that members are aware of the delicate and complicated situation that is now being faced by the Cambodian people with regard to normal functioning of life in those landmine-contaminated areas; that situation poses tremendous obstacles to the country's development efforts.

Since 1993, the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC), which, in close partnership with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, is an integral part of the country's overall response to landmine contamination, has forged ahead with its prioritized plans on a broad-based programme of work. It has made significant progress in building capacity in the areas of mine marking, mine awareness campaigns, mine clearance, capacity-building and training activities. Casualty figures have been reduced significantly, from a monthly average of 600 casualties in 1992 to 56 in September 2000.

At this juncture, my delegation wishes to emphasize that the continued commitment of the Royal Government of Cambodia to implementing its programme to eliminate landmines remains among its top priorities. It has been focused on the programme and the strategies set by CMAC in 1999, in the hope of achieving more results in the demining process based on four guiding principles: land for settlement; agricultural land; land for development; and infrastructure rehabilitation.

Since Cambodia last year enforced its legislation on the banning the utilization, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personal landmines, some progressive measures have already been undertaken to neutralize the anti-personal mines buried in the soil.

Even given the progress achieved so far, we acknowledge the fact that a great deal of work and effort lies ahead in our quest to deal with issues related to increased support and assistance in mine action in Cambodia. In spite of last year's reform of its management and leadership, CMAC is still confronted with financial problems. The insufficiency of funding support, unfortunately, has compelled CMAC to lay off almost one fourth of its operational staff. We believe, however, that the donor community will remain committed to CMAC in a visible and constructive way and will extend its fullest support, as before, bearing in mind that CMAC was born with the support of the donor community and that it has ever since continued to develop as one of the most important national demining institutions in the world. At the symposium on mine action held at Phnom Penh at the beginning of this month, the Royal Government of Cambodia, together with international donors, expressed willingness to establish ongoing communications, to improve the ways of dealing with issues related to landmines, and to consider resuming financial support.

The President returned to the Chair.

Today, in spite of the difficulties that CMAC faces, and their financial impact, the deminers are continuing to do their duty to reduce the risks that Cambodian people face from the dangers posed by the mines that are littered across their land. My delegation is confident that the world community will continue to support Cambodia in the ongoing process of mine clearance and other related activities. The people and the Government of Cambodia certainly would like to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to the world community for the generous support and assistance it has constantly provided to help enable CMAC continuously to take the necessary steps towards attaining its main objectives. Mine clearance is as much a development issue as a humanitarian one. Mine action is not only a tool for development, it is also a feature of development. CMAC continues to encourage partnership, cooperation, collaboration and open communication in the spirit of the development of Cambodia.

At the global level, my delegation welcomed the March 1999 entry into force of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. As a State party to that Convention, Cambodia has observed with interest the progress of work by States parties in the implementation of the provisions of the Convention. We are sharing in the efforts of the international community in this continuous crusade, and we wish to join with the world body and to coordinate with its activities in the fight against all kinds of anti-personnel landmines. We declare this with unbounded willingness; it is in that spirit that Cambodia has been actively involved in the Ottawa process, in order to support the full spectrum of activities which form part of mine action.

My delegation welcomes with satisfaction the conclusion of the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Convention, which took place at Geneva from 11 to 15 September 2000 with a view, inter alia, to providing assistance for mine clearance, rehabilitation, socio-economic integration and the implementation of mine awareness programmes. We note with interest the inter-sessional work programme established by the States parties to the Ottawa Convention, and we look forward to the next meetings of bodies established under that programme, which will take place in December this year.

Cambodia appreciates the strong partnership of the world community, in particular the United Nations system, in its effort to address this humanitarian problem. We strongly support the central coordinating role of the United Nations in establishing and securing the trust fund with a view to providing assistance in mine action to all countries whose peoples suffer as a result of the millions of mines planted in their lands.

With that in mind, my delegation is pleased to be a sponsor of draft resolution A/44/L.44/Rev.1, on assistance in mine action, which is before the Assembly at its current session, just as we joined in sponsoring previous texts on this item. We hope that it will receive broad support and that it will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Petrič (Slovenia): Slovenia has joined the European Union in its statement on assistance in mine action. Additionally, we wish to contribute some specific points to today's discussion.

Anti-personnel landmines do not discriminate as to their targets. It is claimed that they are intended for military purposes, but more frequently they kill, incapacitate and injure civilians. These weapons do not abide by ceasefires or peace agreements. Instead, they continue to afflict anyone who comes into contact with them for a number of years after the end of hostilities.

International mine action is therefore one of the most important, practical and effective humanitarian projects of our time. It is firmly based on the principle of the prohibition of those weapons with excessively injurious or indiscriminate effects, and on the principle of protection of civilians in armed conflict. It is an indispensable component of the evolving concept of human security.

Mine action is legally defined in the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction. The number of States parties to the Convention continues to grow, and the Second Meeting of States Parties, held in Geneva from 11 to 15 September 2000, was a clear demonstration of the continued dynamism and vitality of the global movement to eliminate anti-personnel landmines and of the inevitability of a comprehensive ban on, and the eventual total elimination of, anti-personnel landmines.

The concept of mine action is a comprehensive one that includes the important sectors of demining and the destruction of landmines, the rehabilitation of mine victims and the creation of mine awareness. All of these aspects of international mine action make it one of the important priorities of the United Nations. Member States, non-governmental and other organizations, and trust funds can contribute to its success in a variety of practical, compatible and complementary ways.

Slovenia is deeply supportive of the objectives of international mine action and is committed to destroying its stockpiled anti-personnel landmines by the year 2003. Slovenia has also developed activities to support efforts for the post-conflict rehabilitation of the region of South-East Europe. A large quantity of mines and other unexploded ordnance remained in the region at war's end, and they have been claiming victims every day. They have prevented the local population from returning to their normal lives and refugees from returning to their homes, as well as the expeditious relaunching of economic activity.

Three years ago — in the spirit of the Ottawa Convention and within the general foreign policy orientation of my country — the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance was established, with the aim of offering assistance to the countries of South-East Europe in their mine action.

The International Trust Fund has since been very successful in its endeavours. It has established a genuine partnership with the competent authorities in the countries of the region as well as with other international structures involved in mine action projects, in particular the structures of the United Nations. The International Trust Fund has proved to be the most cost- effective and efficient way to clear mines in the region of South-East Europe. It has provided mine clearance per square metre for a cost as low as $2.50. The International Trust Fund in 1999 mine-cleared as much as two thirds of all mined territory in Bosnia and Herzegovina — to date, 7 million square meters in all — in Croatia, 1.7 million square meters; in Kosovo, 1.8 million square meters; and in Albania 100,000 square meters. In addition, 300 mine victims have received rehabilitation treatment under the International Trust Fund Programme. The International Trust Fund, which has proved to be the most effective and efficient way to clear mines in the region of South-East Europe, has to date attracted donations from 22 Governments in the amount of $56 million.

These are the reasons for our continuing commitment to the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance. We are grateful for the support of a large number of Member States to the Trust Fund and would like to assure them that their donations are being used in the most effective and transparent manner.

Every State Member of the United Nations can contribute to assistance in mine action. Many of the contributions made are practical in nature, while others consist of political support and awareness-raising. All of them are important and need to be recognized as such by the General Assembly.

Mr. Rodríguez Castillo (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Nicaragua welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action, which not only highlights the valuable work being done in this area by the United Nations system, but also stresses the important contribution being made by governmental and non-governmental organizations to the eradication of anti-personnel landmines, which have caused and continue to cause so much harm to defenceless civilians.

Nicaragua is pleased to have been designated host to the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, to be held in Managua in September 2001, and looks forward to the valued participation of all States parties and organizations that are working hard in this difficult field. Similarly, we wish to encourage all States Members of the United Nations to become parties to the Convention so that we may put a definitive end to that scourge, which continues to inflict so much pain on humanity.

Pursuant to the provisions of the Ottawa Convention, we have duly submitted our report to the Secretary-General and continue to promote our national humanitarian demining plan, which we have been very successfully implementing despite the adversities we have had to face, in particular the effects of recent natural disasters, which have disrupted our mine action and necessitated its rescheduling. However, we intend to pursue the process of eliminating stockpiled mines and hope that we will have completed the total destruction of installed landmines by 2004.

In this respect, we express our thanks for the invaluable support we have received from the international community and various organizations for our national demining plan and the programmes associated with it. We wish to emphasize that we have been able to rely on an important component of international monitoring, the Programme for Demining Assistance of the Organization of American States and the Mine Clearance Assistance Mission in Central America. As a result, and striving to attain the goals we have set ourselves, we reiterate our appeal to the international community to continue supporting us in our fight against mines and in our special programme to care for victims and to facilitate their full social and economic reintegration.

We express our commitment to continuing to work for the implementation of all the commitments and programmes of work adopted at the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention, held in Maputo, Mozambique, and at the Second Meeting, held in Geneva, Switzerland. That is why we believe that the

task of demining can wait no longer and that it is an urgent responsibility that all States parties share towards present and future generations. Similarly, we must pursue our programmes to destroy stockpiles, in accordance with the Convention.

Nicaragua is undertaking public education programmes to sensitize the population to the dangers of anti-personnel landmines and to the need for popular cooperation in their complete destruction. In this respect, we appeal to all States Members of the United Nations to consider how we may all join together in the noble task of the total elimination of anti-personnel landmines in all their aspects.

It would be a paradox if, at the dawn of the new millennium, humanity were to enter an era of great technological changes while so many innocent civilians and defenceless children were to continue to die and others, uninvolved in conflict, to be maimed by technological artefacts that humans had themselves created for mutual self-destruction. It is time to direct technological development towards the welfare of human beings so as clearly to demonstrate our resolve to advance in the construction of a better world and a culture of peace.

It would be unacceptable for us to take pride in the development of international humanitarian law and international human rights law if we also allowed landmines to remain an obstacle to the development of affected peoples, preventing the social reintegration not only of their victims, but also of all displaced persons and refugees who aspire to a better life and deserve all our attention.

We firmly believe in the irreversible advance of the humanitarian process of eliminating all existing anti-personnel landmines and the full implementation of the Ottawa Convention, a goal that is in our power to achieve.

Mrs. Martinic (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction is a valuable legal instrument in the context of international security, non-proliferation and disarmament.

Argentina fully shares the purposes and principles underlying the Convention. In this respect, my country's support for the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines is consistent with its disarmament and arms limitation policy of restricting a category of weapon that remains active beyond the conclusion of a conflict and that entails particularly cruel consequences for its victims, including civilians. It is therefore essential for countries that have not signed the Convention to do so as soon as possible in order to facilitate coordinated and effective action by the international community to alleviate the impact of the use of these weapons.

This vocation of my country is reflected in its conviction that freeing our region from the scourge of landmines is an achievable objective. Indeed, through the Political Declaration of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), Bolivia and Chile as a Zone of Peace, signed on 30 July 1998, we have agreed to move towards establishing a MERCOSUR, Bolivian and Chilean zone free of anti-personnel landmines and hope to extend it to the entire western hemisphere.

On 14 September 1999, Argentina ratified the Ottawa Convention. In compliance with its provisions, we submitted our report on transparency measures on 31 August 2000, reflecting our commitment to implementing the obligations emanating from the Convention.

Throughout the world, demining has become an extremely important humanitarian task. Countries with landmine-infested territory must simultaneously confront a tremendous deterioration of economic and social conditions and paralysis in health services and national infrastructure. Anti-personnel landmine clearance is a priority task, indispensable to public security, economic and social development and the protection of human life.

Argentina has highly qualified human resources for demining training and stockpile destruction. Our training centre for humanitarian demining trains and instructs Argentine and foreign military personnel and has mobile demining training teams to disseminate this instruction, which is offered to all organizations and personnel working in countries with landmine problems.

Here is where Argentina joins the contributing nations in providing human resources who can transfer all their experience and training in the tasks of removing and destroying mines. Argentina's commitment to the principles of the Convention has been reflected in practical terms in its contributions in different countries since 1993, with advisers and

experts in mine clearance who provide training, advice and supervision in the field in demining operations.

Technical assistance to demining in Angola, the offer to contribute to demining along the border of Peru and Ecuador in the context of the military observer mission known as the Ecuador-Peru Military Observer Mission (MOMEP), the participation of a team of Argentine army engineers in the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) in Kuwait, the experience of Argentine military experts in Central America and the contribution through the "White Helmets" initiative are some of the concrete actions that my country has carried out in terms of international assistance and cooperation. These actions, along with our continuing presence in international forums, show our firm commitment to and continued support for this legitimate and humanitarian cause.

At the end of 1993, the Argentine Government offered to the British Government to take charge of the clearance of mines planted in the Malvinas Islands during the 1982 conflict. The offer was accepted by the British Government, and currently there is bilateral consideration of ways to conduct a feasibility study, before the demining process is begun, which will establish under what conditions the operation can be carried out.

Argentina firmly supports the objectives of international and civil organizations in the efforts to eradicate anti-personnel landmines and wishes to stimulate the enhancement of international cooperation in this field by providing experts, training, equipment and a training centre. We must emphasize the relevance of the Organization of American States (OAS), the United Nations Mine Action Service and the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance in their work to help States parties in the development and implementation of projects by identifying technical and financial resources required for landmine destruction and by facilitating international certification. This task, which deserves our sincere recognition, should be promoted by all Member States.

The growing number of ratifications of the Ottawa Convention shows that far from weakening the security of States in any way, it is a measure of mutual confidence among the countries in a given region. This is demonstrated by the intention expressed by the countries of the Rio Group before their Oslo meeting to bind themselves to the provisions of the Convention, viewing it as a security guarantee for the Latin American region.

By enshrining fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, the Ottawa Convention encourages increased joint efforts to help victims of this scourge. Along with mine clearance and the destruction of stockpiles, this is the great task of the years to come.

The Ottawa Convention enshrined in international obligations the people's demand for the elimination of these weapons that have caused serious damage to civilian populations and whose negative effects persist for decades, well beyond the end of the conflicts that lead to their use. Our region is among those that have best responded to this demand, and this is shown by the fact that almost all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are parties to this instrument or are on the way to becoming parties.

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean live in a climate of peace and friendship that is one of the objective advantages of our region. This has enabled us to be pioneers in setting up a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. The declaration of MERCOSUR, Bolivia and Chile as a zone of peace, as well as several resolutions of the General Assembly of the OAS, shows that we also seek to be a zone free of anti-personnel mines. We must all contribute with earnestness to accomplish this task. Argentina is prepared to do everything necessary to this end.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): The effectiveness of anti-personnel mines in military conflicts — frequently used as an argument by those still unwilling to sign the Ottawa Convention — indeed has proven itself to be a superfluous element in modern warfare, according to many military analysts and experts. Civilian casualties in the aftermath of military conflicts are often the main result of the usage of these, I dare say, monstrous devices.

The Republic of Croatia, as one of the most mine-affected countries, has a direct experience of disastrous effects of mines and therefore attaches utmost importance to mine-action assistance. Starting from its own experience, my country welcomes all efforts leading towards a global ban on anti-personnel landmines. We also welcome all constructive proposals and projects enabling the realization of a total prohibition of the use of landmines, and their destruction, and stand ready to cooperate with all other

mine-affected countries and all those who have an interest in fighting this disease.

Years of bitter fighting left approximately one million mines and unexploded ordnance scattered over the territory of the Republic of Croatia. Mine-suspected areas are estimated to cover 4,500 square kilometres. Such a high density of mines represents a tremendous obstacle for normal functioning of life in these areas, particularly in predominately agricultural regions, and hampers the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes.

The lack of plans of the existing minefields presents an additional obstacle in the mine clearance process. Therefore, from this podium, I would like to invite all those who are in a position to help, to do so. Following the cessation of hostilities, any country or individual possessing plans that could facilitate mine clearance activities and choosing not to forward them becomes an accomplice in the tragedy of future innocent victims.

Despite difficulties, the mine-clearance process in Croatia is proceeding well and is carried out in accordance with the highest international standards. The United Nations established the Mine Action Centre in Croatia in 1996, which has merged with the Croatian Mine Action Centre established in 1998. This year we witnessed the transfer of responsibility from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to the United Nations Development Programme, and we welcomed this step. However, since donor support is crucial to the programme's success, we appeal for continuous financial support for the United Nations programme in Croatia. In the course of the past few years, numerous delegations visited the Croatian Mine Action Centre, and, to my knowledge, all of them were very satisfied with what they observed.

The mine-clearance process is not only extremely dangerous and time-consuming but is also a very expensive activity. In this respect, a Croatian team of experts is looking into the most favourable solutions to achieve the safest and most cost-effective projects that would enable efficient mine action. In the past few years, the cost of mine clearance and other mine-action activities in the Republic of Croatia has amounted to nearly $150 million. The Government of Croatia has borne 90 per cent of these costs, while 10 per cent were covered from a donation fund. We are very thankful to all countries — particularly the United States, Germany, Canada, Switzerland, Norway, Japan, Sweden, Belgium, the United Kingdom, France and Italy — international organizations, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations — such as the Slovenian International Trust Fund, Roots for Peace and others — for their valuable contributions.

Experts from the Croatian Mine Action Centre have estimated that 10 more years of mine clearance, at the general cost of over one billion dollars, are required to be able to say that most of the work has been achieved. The Republic of Croatia presently uses the capacity of 23 authorized mine clearance companies, special police forces of the Croatian Interior Ministry and the Croatian Mine Action Centre in the implementation of surveys, marking and mine clearance. The development and implementation of new and sophisticated technologies in mine detection is expected in the near future. We hope that this will accelerate mine clearance procedures, lower its cost and increase the reliability and safety of mine clearance.

As proof of continual improvement in the mine-action process in Croatia, I would like to draw members' attention to the following encouraging trends. Last year we witnessed 53 casualties; this year the number has dropped to 26. Last year we cleared 24 square kilometres, while this year we shall clear more than 50 square kilometres. This year we started with two hours of mine-awareness programmes in primary schools. Next year the same programme will be taught in high schools as well.

Croatia looks to the follow-up of the Ottawa process as a catalyst for genuinely advancing mine action throughout the world. It is precisely the humanitarian nature of the Ottawa movement that has contributed most to the creation of a political will and to readiness to support this praiseworthy initiative. Based on our own experiences, we firmly believe that more forceful action is still required at the national, regional and global levels.

At the national level, I am pleased to say we have adopted the National Mine Action Programme, a plan devised by the Government and confirmed by Parliament whose ultimate aim is to resolve the mine problem in Croatia by 2010. We also initiated bilateral cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed at

mine clearance in the border region between the two countries.

Regionally, Croatia plays a very active role in the Stability Pact Working Group on Mine Action and will host the first formal meeting of the Group in December. In the same regional framework, we have also presented the project for the Regional Centre for Personnel Training and Testing of Equipment, and we hope to receive broad support for it.

Globally, Croatia will work hard with all interested countries to support the Ottawa Convention in its next phase. The draft resolution now under consideration on assistance in mine action should provide a useful input to our deliberations on the preparatory process. The United Nations role in increasing international mine-related activities and cooperation remains indisputable, and we look forward to the United Nations ongoing contribution and involvement in this important issue.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China understands the international community's humanitarian concerns about the indiscriminate use of landmines against innocent civilians, and we support international efforts in this regard. The Chinese Government attaches great importance to the issue of the indiscriminate use of landmines against innocent civilians. We support the reasonable and appropriate restrictions on the use of landmines.

Since 1992, the Chinese Government has conducted two large-scale mine-clearance operations in the provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi. According to incomplete statistics, these operations removed more than 2.2 million landmines and explosive devices of various types and destroyed more than 7 million tons of unexploded ordnance and other explosives. We have also cleared 240 square kilometres. We have cleared more than 170 corridors and ports for border trade and have restored more than 60,000 hectares of farmland, grazing land and forests, otherwise reserved for landmines.

The Chinese Government has actively participated in international assistance in mine action. We have provided the mine-affected countries with assistance. In 1998 China contributed $100 thousand to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action, earmarked for demining activity in Bosnia.

Since last year China has cooperated with United Nations bodies and has organized the second international mine-awareness training course for participants from seven mine-affected countries. China has also provided them with detectors and demining facilities. China, as a developing country, will continue, to the best of its ability, to join international mine-action efforts and assistance and will try to open up more land to peace and tranquillity for mine-affected countries.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): As a nation that has long lived under the threat of war, Israel longs for the day when civilian life will be free from the threat of anti-personnel landmines. It is our fervent conviction that these undiscriminating weapons, which echo shots fired long ago and conflicts raging miles away, have no place in civil society. In times of peace they strike at the edge of innocence, shattering civilian lives and tormenting families. And yet, the past decade has yielded a glimmer of hope: in the Middle East and elsewhere, people from different nations who clashed on yesterday's battlefields are clearing the minefields today.

This, indeed, captures what Israel believes to be the most important theme of the effort against the devastation of anti-personnel landmines: cooperation. The report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action reaffirms the findings, widely acknowledged for over a decade, that actions by individual States alone can no longer quell the humanitarian threat posed by anti-personnel landmines. This conforms with Israel's general position on disarmament, which has long maintained that cooperative regional arrangements are the best mechanisms for curbing the proliferation of arms and for combating the scourge of landmines in the Middle East, a region where wars, armed conflict and political non-recognition are still common.

Such cooperation, we believe, provides a model for the international community as a whole. I should like to point out just a few small examples from the experience of my own battle-scarred country that illustrate this principle.

The Jordan Valley is still infested with anti-personnel landmines planted decades ago. Israel and Jordan, which forged a treaty of peace in 1994, have agreed to launch a large-scale project to demine the Jordan Valley. The project covers all facets in the fight

against anti-personnel landmines, from actually demining the landscape to educating the population at large and rehabilitating the victims.

On the heels of this combined effort, a broader cooperative venture was launched. Canada and Norway lent their resources and expertise to the Jordan Valley project as part of their overall efforts to reduce the effects of anti-personnel landmines. Now other nations have expressed interest in joining the Jordan Valley project. Cooperation, it seems, is contagious.

It must be noted, however, that even the most thorough demining projects will not suffice, in our region or anywhere else in the world, unless they are accompanied by a parallel effort to educate the general population about the dangers of landmines. As outlined in the Secretary-General's report, information-management techniques must be used to ensure that mine-affected communities can coexist safely with a mine threat.

To this end, Israel and other nations have taken an active role in the Mine Awareness Project of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Angola. Our volunteers, and those of other nations, have worked to educate the population, treat victims and set up a special database. Israel has also made substantial contributions to the financing of this project. The Coordinator of the UNICEF project, Mr. Hanoch Bar-Levy of Israel, reported that the Angola experience offers valuable lessons to other mine-affected areas.

As I have mentioned, Israel attaches primary importance to regional arrangements as an answer to questions regarding security and stability in the Middle East. At the same time, this approach has not prevented Israel from supporting the efforts of the international community to curb the proliferation of conventional and non-conventional weapons and, where appropriate, from endorsing global arrangements that do not impair Israel's vital security margins. Israel's accession to the Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and its observance of the restrictions placed on the use of anti-personnel landmines are clear manifestations of this view.

In addition, Israel has initiated a number of other steps aimed at controlling the proliferation of landmines and other weapons world-wide. In 1994, Israel enacted a moratorium on the export of anti-personnel landmines and last year announced a decision to renew the moratorium until the year 2002. We are now considering a more permanent arrangement which will extend the moratorium indefinitely. Israel has also supported the General Assembly call for a moratorium and hopes to contribute to an agreement banning all transfers of anti-personnel landmines.

Due to Israel's unique situation in the Middle East, which involves an ongoing threat of hostilities from neighbouring and regional States, as well as terrorist threats and actions along its borders, Israel is still obliged to maintain its ability to use anti-personnel landmines for self-defence in general, and along the borders in particular, in accordance with the requirements of the CCW. Accordingly, at this juncture Israel is unable to commit itself to a total ban on the use of anti-personnel landmines, as they remain indispensable for the protection of civilians threatened by terrorist infiltration and for ensuring the protection of the Israeli Defence Forces. At the same time, Israel supports a gradual process in which each State will undertake to cease proliferation of anti-personnel landmines, accept restrictions on their possible use and — once circumstances permit — ban their production and use.

Along those lines, Israel has ceased all production of anti-personnel landmines, and we hope that others in the region will soon follow suit. We are actively working to eliminate the need for landmines, in the hope that ultimately we can enact a complete regional ban on the use of landmines.

Let us hope that international cooperation will heal the world of the devastation caused by these devices and put an end to the hostilities that perpetuate them.

The President: According to the decision taken earlier, I now call on the observer of Switzerland.

Mr. Helg (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland attaches great importance to mine action, which it has made a priority of its peace and security policy. Switzerland supports the United Nations in its fight against mines by providing it not only with financial means, but also with human and material resources, and Switzerland intends to further increase its effort in this field in the future.

We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action. We are pleased that the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining — which was set up on the initiative of

Switzerland and which is largely financed by Switzerland — is able to provide significant support to the United Nations in the fields of research and operational assistance and to make available the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA).

My country recognizes the key role of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in coordinating, implementing and managing the United Nations mine-action policies. We take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Martin Barber on being appointed the Chief of the Service and to ensure him of our full support. We encourage the Mine Action Service to continue its efforts, particularly in the areas of quality assurance and the preparation of international standards for mine action. We note with satisfaction that close cooperative relations have been established between UNMAS and all the other relevant United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes.

My Government has taken note with concern of the grave financial difficulties of the Mine Action Service, which are calling into question not only the operation of the Service itself, but also the programmes and projects undertaken in the affected countries. We therefore invite the Secretary-General to present to the General Assembly, as promptly as possible, proposals for means of ensuring long-term funding for what is one of the essential tasks of the United Nations.

Switzerland is providing financial support to the tune of 5 million Swiss francs to many countries and organizations for their demining work. It is also providing experts to national and United Nations mine-action centres. These experts contribute to the coordination of demining efforts and to making sure these efforts are carried out in accordance with international standards.

Bearing in mind the joint strategy of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Health Organization, as well as the guidelines of the United Nations Children's Fund, Switzerland has promoted and supported a global, integrated and non-discriminatory approach to victim assistance. It has also assumed the co-chairmanship of the Standing Committee of Experts on Victim Assistance, which was set up under the Convention on anti-personnel mines.

This approach won very wide support at the Second Conference of the States Parties to the Convention, and it is now also being applied by UNMAS and the United Nations Development Programme. Emphasis is being placed on implementing this approach in pilot countries such as Mozambique, Afghanistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The approach adopted recognizes the role of both Governments and civil society in bringing about a real improvement in the situation of victims. It pursues two objectives: promoting coordination mechanisms within countries and elaborating coherent strategies for assistance to victims.

In the field of demining, Switzerland attaches particular importance to cooperation with local partners. In Mozambique, a priority-action country, Switzerland has established close relations with the national demining institute, while emphasizing the responsibility incumbent on the competent authorities for demining actions. The strengthening of local capacities makes it possible for the peoples concerned to deal with the long-term consequences of the problem, but it also means that the contributors must make a greater effort. They must trust the local potential, and they must be prepared to take certain risks.

Furthermore, the Swiss demining policy takes broad account of the socio-economic context and seeks to involve all concerned actors in the operations, in order to create stable conditions for peacekeeping in the countries. It is also our constant concern to link demining programmes with programmes of development cooperation and peace promotion.

The Swiss army is giving assistance in the field by providing human and material resources. The structures and capacities concerned are now being strengthened, and the activities will be further stepped up in 2001.

At this time, three Swiss experts, military and civilian, are on mission abroad, all within the United Nations framework, in Kosovo, Yemen and Somalia. By the end of 2002, a pool of 40 qualified experts will be operational within the Swiss army in order better to meet the needs of future international humanitarian demining programmes.

As concerns training capacities, the Swiss army, through the Partnership for Peace, is offering international training courses as part of the Information Management System for Mine Action programme. Furthermore, in the framework of the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines, a training

course in the management and destruction of stockpiles will be organized in 2001.

On the international scene, Switzerland wishes to stress two points: first, the universalization of the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines. One hundred and thirty-nine countries have signed the Convention and 108 countries have ratified it. This is the successful result of very fruitful cooperation between States and non-governmental organizations. The Second Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention, which took place in Switzerland from 11-15 September last, highlighted once again the importance of such cooperation and its very special nature.

Secondly, at the Second Meeting of States Parties, significant progress was noted in the implementation of the Convention. We note in particular the considerable efforts made by committees of experts during the inter-sessional period. They helped to shed light on still outstanding questions, to promote the establishment of standards, to develop strategies and to provide practical solutions to problems.

It is an honour for Geneva to have hosted not only the annual Conference of States parties but also the meetings of expert committees. In particular, we welcome the decision of the States parties to increase the effectiveness of these expert committees and the important role played by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining in this process.

We would like to express our gratitude to Nicaragua, which will be hosting the third annual Conference in Managua next year. My country has always upheld the principle that the annual Conferences of States parties to the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines should take place alternately in Geneva and in one of the affected countries. Switzerland would also be prepared to fulfil other functions in pursuance of the objectives of the Convention in the inter-sessional process following the next annual Conference in Nicaragua, as it has already done, in partnership with Mexico, in the context of assistance to victims.

Despite the success of the implementation of the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines, we must not forget that certain States — and not the least important among them — have not yet acceded to the Convention. We must therefore persevere in the effort to promote universal accession to the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines and to ensure its implementation.

One final point that concerns us is that of non-State actors. Within its concept of humanitarian action, Switzerland attaches great importance to the promotion worldwide of respect for international humanitarian law. The implementation of humanitarian principles means that all armed groups, including non-State actors, must be willing to renounce the use of anti-personnel mines. In recent months we have organized or supported various workshops on this question. We also discussed the matter at the ministerial meeting on the human security network, which took place in Lucerne last May. In this field, as in others, there are no ready-made solutions. This is why we invite the States concerned and non-governmental organizations to reflect on this question with us.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. I should like to inform members that action on draft resolution A/55/L.44/Rev.1 will be taken at a later date to be announced.

Postponement of the date of recess

The President: I should like to draw the attention of members to the date of recess of the current session. Members will recall that at its 9th plenary meeting, on 11 September 2000, the General Assembly decided that the fifty-fifth session would recess on Tuesday, 5 December 2000. However, I have been informed by the Chairman of the Fifth Committee that the Committee will not be able to conclude its work by 5 December 2000. The Assembly will therefore not be able to conclude its work by that date. I should like, therefore, to propose to the Assembly that it postpone the date of recess of the current session to Friday, 15 December 2000.

If there is no objection, may I take it that the Assembly agrees to this proposal?

It was so decided.

Programme of work

The President: I should like to inform members of some additions to the programme of work of the General Assembly.

On Thursday morning, 13 November 2000, the General Committee of the General Assembly will hold

a meeting at 9.30 a.m. in Conference Room 3 to consider a request by several countries, contained in document A/55/238, for the inclusion in the agenda of the current session of an agenda item entitled "Proclamation of 31 August as the International Day of Solidarity".

On Monday morning, 4 December, the General Assembly will take up agenda item 43, "The situation in Central America: procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development".

On Tuesday morning, 12 December, the General Assembly will consider the reports of the Sixth Committee.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.